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To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

I CANNOT, by any means, agree with the sentiments expressed by the person who subscribes himself "A Real Freethinker," in your late Number, relative to the Bible Society. I am as warm a friend to *toleration* as he can be. I wish my Catholic brethren *complete emancipation*; and I wish to make no distinction between any religious sects; but I am most decidedly of opinion, that the Bible Society is perfectly right in disseminating the Holy Scriptures without note or comment. It thus allows every man the *free exercise* of his judgment, in a matter of the highest importance to his eternal salvation: it leaves him unconstrained by the shackles of authority: it permits him to inhale the divine waters of life, uncontaminated by earthly mixtures. And I am astonished that a *Freethinker* can object to such a proceeding, as "illiberal and exclusive;" or say that the Institution must necessarily be "confined in its operation and extent," *because it prohibits every thing sectarian*. Surely these are not the sentiments of Freethinkers in general? I have no objection whatever to the circulation of the Doway Bible: nay, I think its circulation would be a great *improvement* on the regulations of our Society; but I certainly would have it *unaccompanied with comments*. I would give it equal justice with the Protestant version. I would mutilate neither of them with fallible interpretations. Every thing in Scripture, essential to our happiness, is easily understood, and need not be perplexed by human sophistry. It therefore argues an equal want of liberality and good sense, to accuse the Society of a "proselytizing spirit," because it studiously avoids every thing like party, and diffuses the gospel in its native purity, undis-

guised by many coloured trappings. But why must the clergy of the Roman Catholic church insist upon an exception in their favour, when the Protestants require none for themselves? Were *our versions* edited with notes, so I think should *theirs*. This would be but fair. Beyond this, there is no necessity for complying. I also think that the ministers of every church ought to have considerable influence with their respective congregations; but I reprobate the idea of *clerical supremacy*, which would establish its dominion on the wreck of reason; which would take from man the inestimable privilege of determining for himself. On this principle, and this alone, I object to the introduction of the Doway version, unless divested of its notes; but so divested, I would vote for its reception.

Before your correspondent informed the *public*, that the Bible Institution was "very limited in its operation and extent," he would have done well to have procured some information *for himself*, on this important subject. He should have read the annual reports of the London Society. During the thirteen months preceding its last meeting, it issued 35,690 Bibles, and 70,733 Testaments. It has printed copies of the Scriptures in nearly fifty different languages. It has diffused them through every quarter of the globe. Nor can your correspondent be so ignorant as not to know, that the exclusion of the Doway version can only affect the circulation of the Scriptures in *our own territories*; and that it was only printed for the Catholics of *these Kingdoms*: being first translated at Doway for that purpose, from the Latin text, into the English tongue, in the year 1614. Whereas, one would suppose, from the "*Freethinker's*" statement, that the exclusion of this

version was to have an *universal* effect, in confining the diffusion of religious knowledge. But let us candidly examine, whether its admission or rejection be *really* a matter of importance. I know but little of the Irish in the South. But I know, that in the North, the Catholic peasantry make not the least objection to either reading or purchasing the common Bible. I know that most of them have it in their houses: that they are *not prohibited* by their clergy from having it; and that they very seldom have any other. Indeed, numbers of them, who are perfectly well acquainted with the Scriptures, are entirely ignorant that there is such a book in existence as the Doway Bible. Of this fact I had lately a most conclusive instance; For, being desirous of perusing that book, I sent to borrow it from different Roman Catholics in the parish where I reside; when, to my surprise, not one of them had it; few of them had heard of it: but they all were in possession of the common Bible. I next applied for it to a respectable bookseller in the town of Lisburn; but he said "he had no demand for it, and therefore did not keep it." I much doubt, therefore, whether the want of this edition is in any respect a drawback to the disseminating the Scriptures, *even in these Kingdoms*. But if its absence from our Societies does really prevent a single individual from enjoying the pure light of heavenly truth, I should most sincerely wish for its presence, *provided* we could have it without the appendages attached to it by erring mortals. I am too much of a *Freethinker* to wish for it on other terms.

M——D.

Lambeg.

N.B. The writer of the above is quite ignorant of the real signature of the "*Freethinker*;" nothing personal can therefore be intended.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

WITHOUT intending to give offence to any of your worthy correspondents, I shall attempt to say a few things in behalf of that poor fellow known by the various signatures of "H.H.H.," "D.," "William," &c, to whom, in a late number of your Magazine, the whip has been applied with considerable energy; and who must have most sensibly felt the smart, for his perhaps somewhat barefaced plagiarisms. Some may allege, that to such a person feeling is not very applicable, and that the scourge has been exercised in vain. It must be acknowledged, there is a happy callousness of heart, which is sometimes the concomitant of dullness of head. Those who possess these qualities in any superior degree, are proof against the keenest invectives. Under an impenetrable coat, they can, in drowsy serenity, trudge along the path of life, disregarding censure's bitterest blast.

"O, Dullness, portion of the truly blest,
Calm shelter'd haven of eternal rest.—"

—So heavy passive to the tempest's shocks
Strong on the sign post stands the stupid ox."

But surely this gentleman is not so insensible, who *thus humbly* aspires to the high honours of poetry; that description of fine writing whose very essence is sensibility and sense. Taking this for granted, and supposing his nicer feelings to be much hurt on this and former occasions, as also, that he may blush to come forward in his own defence, in the face of a censorious world, permit me to apologize in a few hints to the discerning reader.

Bad poets have been exposed to ridicule in all ages; but plagiarists are not bad poets. They would willingly present to view those things that are not in the hands of all, to